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ABSTRACT

This research reports on an attempt to construct a brief questionnaire which could indicate the fitness of an applicant for a position as a deputy sheriff and predict some of his/her probable on-the-job behaviors. The research presents: (1) a discussion of problems involved in using an applicant's interview behavior to predict fitness for employment; (2) an overview of research literature suggesting variables pertinent to on-the-job performance of law enforcement officers; (3) an application of these variables to the fitness of an applicant for the position of deputy sheriff; (4) a report of construction and testing of a measure relating to the previously discussed behavior of an officer on the job; and (5) the projection for the next phase of this research which would apply revised "philosophy" items and a more selective set of predictor variables. (Author/PC)

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SCREENING APPLICANTS FOR EMPLOYMENT IN LAW ENFORCEMENT[1]

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Using a brief interview or testing situation to gain relevant information from an applicant for employment represents a persistent problem in organizational communication. The research to be reported here represents an attempt to construct a brief questionnaire which could indicate the fitness of an applicant for a position as a deputy sheriff, and predict certain of his probable on-the-job behaviors.

The research is reported in the following phases:

A. A discussion of problems involved in using an applicant's behavior during interviews to predict his fitness for employment.
B. An overview of research literature suggesting variables pertinent to on-the-job performance of law enforcement officers.
C. An application of these variables to the fitness of an applicant for the position of deputy sheriff.
D. A report of construction and testing of a measure relating to the previously discussed behavior of an officer on the job.
E. The projection of the next phase of this research.

A. Problems in Employment Interviewing

Employers are faced with a difficult task when positions must be filled. The employer, or his representative, must briefly and humanely attempt to assess the competence of particular applicants for the job without valid or efficient measures. The best way to determine the fitness of the applicant is to have him perform the job. This is at best impractical; so employers seek indicators of on-the-job performance through artificially structured measurement techniques within the job interview.

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In such cases the employer must be willing to trust the validity of his predictive measures, accept the burden of training the employee, and be willing to replace him in the event that his work is sub-par. Additionally, the employer is responsible for coping with the effects of the employee's early mistakes. These problems make apparent the difficulty of the prospective employer's task. He must find a way to measure fitness for a particular job, cutting through role-playing facades imposed by the job interview situation (Fear, 14-31).

In some occupations, hiring an incompetent employee leads only to expense and inconvenience. In positions such as those in law enforcement, however, hiring the wrong person presents dangers to the safety of the community, and

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the safety of other officers. In such situations it seems wise to determine whether these exist readily measurable variables which could be directly related to the competence of an applicant for the job. If sets of physical, attitudinal, and demographic variables could be related to job performance, a brief paper and pencil questionnaire could be administered to all potential recruits and an applicant's performance on such a measure could be used as an aid in the hiring decision.

B. Predicting Successful Employment in a Law Enforcement Officer

Recent years have seen considerable interest in research in law enforcement. One subset of this literature relates success or failure of an officer on his job to attitudinal, physical, and demographic variables. Wilson suggests that law enforcement employers should seek out men who

> "can handle calmly challenges to their self-respect and manhood; are able to tolerate ambiguous situations; are able to accept responsibility for the consequences of their own actions; can understand and apply legal concepts in concrete situations (Whisenand, 1973: 9)."

Some of the specific variables thought to be related to law enforcement effectiveness are as follows:

Height and Weight. In a job frequently involved with physical encounters, many departments feel that an officer should be somewhat above average in size and stature. It has been suggested that the only manner in which law enforcement officers differ from the general population is that they are larger than normal (Whisenand, 1973: 9).

Age. Younger applicants are seen as having potentially greater learning ability, longer employment capacity, and better health than older applicants (Neidenhoffer, 1967: 180).

Education: Better educated officers are thought to be more compassionate, maleable to innovation and easier to train than the less well educated men (Wilson, 1969: 188). A convenient example of the equivocal findings on the desirability of young, better educated officers is available in observing the Los Angeles Police Department, which has a large percentage of college educated officers. It would be interesting to test whether their record is better than those departments which put less emphasis on education (Neiderhoffer, 1967: 179-181).

Experience: The amount of experience in law enforcement which an officer brings to his job is often taken as a measure of his efficiency. Empirical evidence for this is equivocal (Whisenand, 1973: 15).

Training. All law enforcement agencies require recruits to undergo some sort of training (either provided by the hiring agency or contracted with another agency or educational institution). The duration of this training as well as the attitudes the recruits feel toward the training are thought to affect the performance of the officer (Whisenand, 1973: 9-16).

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Salary. One cannot overlook the effect of money on the job performance and satisfaction of law enforcement officers. Applicants commonly know the pay scale for the positions they seek, and such information may be meaningful to their expectations and performance (Whisenand, 1973: 12).

Attitudinal Variables. It is difficult to discover a discussion of the problems associated with careers in law enforcement which doesn't mention the persistent problem of anomie, the feeling of normlessness which seems to accompany law enforcement jobs (Alex, 1969: 11; Wilson, 1969: 44-45). The officer is daily confronted with situations for which there is not a truly "correct" answer, nor a "correct" course of action. The officer is nonetheless required to make a decision, solve the problem, or take some course of action. Added to this is the problem that the job is seen as a 24 hour a day trust, and the officer is expected to intercede as needed, even when off duty. This situation makes it difficult to carry on normal friendships and neighborhood relations. Anomie may be tied to other personality variables in the fashion that personality variables tend to cluster (Cronkhite, 1969: 130-134). It seems that anomie might be found to be related to attitudinal variables such as intolerance to ambiguity, dogmatism, self-image and self-esteem, and feelings of job prestige (Whisenand, 1973: 9; Rubinstein, 1973: 141).

Law Enforcement Philosophy Variables. Whisenand states that applicants are usually subjected to tests which are (perhaps unjustifiably) taken as predictive of capacity to perform the role requirements of a police officer (Whisenand, 1973: 9). There exists a clear need for screening instruments which will suggest relationships between paper and pencil tests and job effectiveness. It is difficult to measure the performance of an applicant when he knows nothing of how the job is done, but it is possible to measure his philosophy concerning broad concepts of role behavior.

Given a description of a typical situation in law enforcement, in which there are several "correct" actions, the applicant could be asked to indicate his preference among several alternatives. One might measure his propensity toward leniency in nonthreatening situations, his propensity to exact revenge in a threatening situation, and his reaction to a fellow officer who exhibits symptoms of "defensive bravado" (Perry used this term to denote a coping behavior used by officers suffering from the cynicism resulting from anomie (Perry, 1972)). Such measures may be taken as an indication of the capacity of an applicant to perform the "role requirements" involved in working with a particular sheriff's office.

C. The Office of Sheriff

The previous discussion was drawn largely from research with municipal police forces. There are a number of other forms of law enforcement agencies which are less studied, but equally important in the lives of those who rely upon law enforcement. County Sheriffs' Offices have been overlooked in much research, but these are the primary law enforcement agencies in every county of the nation. Sheriffs' offices trace their jurisdiction well back in English common law and remain the principle law enforcement agency in many segments of the nation (particularly in the Southwest). It is common that the sheriff is the only elected law enforcement official in any particular county.

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It is the purpose of this research to provide sheriffs with a questionnaire to aid in hiring deputies. Though there are instruments in use testing applicants for law enforcement jobs (Whisenand, 1973: 9), applicability to such settings is questionable.

One unsettled issue in such research is defining how effective job behavior and attitude can best be measured. Arrest records, disciplinary actions, ratings by superior officers all seem to reflect narrow views of the term "effectiveness." There is a probability that the effectiveness of a deputy is a situational concept, dependent on the congruence of the attitudes of the officer, those of the sheriff, and those of the community (Cleaver, 1960: 133-134). The amount of territory policed and the makeup of the constituent populace varies from office to office. There is no reason to believe that any particular physical-personality profile will yield an efficient deputy in every setting. Rather it is expected that varying types of profiles will be effective in varying settings.

In this light, this research proposes that the employer (sheriff) should be provided with indications of the type of "correct" behavior and attitude a recruit feels he will exhibit in situations where there may be several permissible alternatives. The sheriff, who must decide what type of law enforcement he wishes to mete out in his county, can use this information in employment decisions.

D. Construction and Testing of the Questionnaire

A prototype questionnaire was prepared on the basis of the foregoing discussion. The questionnaire was a pencil and paper instrument with items concerning: physical variables (height, weight, age); demographics (education, experience, training, salary); attitudinal variables (self-concept, self-esteem /Robinson and Shaver, 1969: 100-101/, personal competence /Robinson and Shaver, 1969: 102/, and intolerance to ambiguity /Robinson and Shaver, 1969: 321/; and measures of law enforcement philosophy (situational paragraphs testing, leniency, desire for revenge, defensive bravado).

Subjects and Procedures. Subjects completing the questionnaire were 13 deputies from the Sheriff's Office, Travis County, Texas. All were uniformed male field officers.

Under conditions of strict confidentiality, the subjects filled out the previously described instrument. The data were subjected to intercorrelation analysis, factor analysis, and regression analysis to discover realtionships among the items.

Results. These data were first subjected to intercorrelation analysis. Some expected relationships are represented in this analysis. For example, height and weight were related (.62), as were age and experience (.46), self-esteem and personal competence (.89), self-concept and personal competence (.90), schooling and training (.43). There was a negative correlation between education and the "prestige" rating of the deputy's job (-.60). There were enigmatic positive correlations between height, intolerance to ambiguity (.69), and weight and intolerance to ambiguity (.44).

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TABLE 1

Percent of Total Variance	Factor Number	Variables	Loadings
23	I Self-Image	Self-Esteem	.89
		Deputy Prestige	.87
20	II Size-Intolerance	Height	.89
		Intolerance to Ambiguity	.84
17	III Training-Pay	Pay	.82
		Training	.77

The leniency paragraph correlated negatively with height (-.59) and weight (-.48), while correlating positively with experience (.60). This leniency variable was negatively correlated with intolerance to ambiguity (-.61), to self-esteem (-.56) and to personal competence (-.54).

The revenge paragraph correlated negatively with weight (-.43) and training (-.46). Revenge correlated positively with self-concept (.37), intolerance to ambiguity (.32), and self-esteem (.36).

The defensive bravado paragraph correlated positively with height (.42), and weight (.43), and negatively with experience (-.47).

These data indicate that many of the variables were meaningfully correlated to the philosophy paragraphs and further than they were related among themselves.

When physical background and attitudinal variables were subjected to factor analysis, three factors emerged. Variables were classified as part of a factor when their loadings with that factor exceeded .75. See Table 1 for a listing of the variables in each factor. Factor I, accounting for over 25% of the total variance, was thought to represent various aspects of the subject's self-image. Factor II (20% of the variance) brought together the size of the subject and his intolerance to ambiguity. Factor III (17% of the variance) represented salary and training.

Regression models were constructed using selected variables and the factors as predictors, and selected variables and the philosophy paragraphs as criteria. In these cases some variables emerged as reasonably accurate predictors. For instance, self-concept was predicted by the Personal Competence scale, the experience factor and the size-intolerance factor R^2=.93; F<.01. The self-esteem scale was predicted by the Personal Competence scale, deputy prestige, and the size-intolerance factor (R^2=.90; F<.01). The Personal Competence scale was predicted by the three factors (R^2=.85; F<.01). These findings reflect the previously noted positive correlations among these several variables.

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The major purpose of the regression analysis was to establish predictors of the "philosophy measures." Though the models using the philosophy paragraphs as criteria provide no statistically significant findings, the data suggest possible trends in prediction. The leniency paragraph, for instance, has an R^2 of .41 using the size-intolerance factor and the self-image factor as predictors ($F<.30$). The revenge paragraph was predicted by the self-image factor, the size-intolerance factor, and the training-pay factor to the following extent: $R^2=.55$; $F<.35$.

Discussion. The findings of these analyses provide some data potentially useful to sheriffs. If a sheriff feels that a measure of personal competence aids employment screening, correlational and factor data suggest that any of those used would prove adequate. The Personal Competence scale is recommended since it proved most related to other variables.

The factor analysis revealed three factors:

Factor I, Self-Image, describes how the applicant feels about himself and correlated positively (.59) with intolerance to ambiguity, which is a trait of questionable value in law enforcement. Wilson argues that law enforcement officers must be able to cope with constant ambiguity (Whisenand, 1973: 9).

Factor II, Size-Intolerance to Ambiguity, suggests that larger officers are less tolerant to ambiguity. This conflicts with the conventional wisdom "Napoleon complex" which envisions small men compensating for their size with intolerance and aggressive behavior. There is some possibility that a larger officer is more able to retain his intolerance in a job in which physical size and strength are assets. It has previously been stated that law enforcement officers tend to be larger than the general populace. If large size is related to intolerance to ambiguity among officers, the advisability of present practices which screen out small applicants is questionable.

Factor III, Training-Pay, indicates that deputies are rewarded with more pay for additional training, which is encouraging.

Regression analyses revealed no statistically significant predictions of the "philosophy" items by other variables. The lack of significance may have resulted from too few alternative answers to the paragraphs, or they may have been due to small sample size. Some nonsignificant predictions deserve discussion. Prediction of responses on the "leniency" item was highest for the size-intolerance factor and the self-image factor ($R^2=.41$; $p<.3$). Both the self-image factor (-.35) and the size-intolerance factor (-.60) correlate negatively with the leniency item, weakly suggesting that the most lenient officer is a small, tolerant man with low self-esteem.

The nonsignificant ($R^2=55$; $p<.35$) prediction of responses on the "revenge" item also deserves scrutiny. The factors correlated with tendency to exact revenge are as follows: self-image (.44), size-intolerance (-.27), and training-pay (-.38). These correlations suggest that the officer most likely to act vengeful is the same man who was most lenient above, but who is also likely to be less trained and poorly paid.

Finally, it is interesting to note that Factor I correlates positively with the revenge item (.44), yet negatively with the leniency item (-.35). It

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is probable that high self-image is associated with lack of leniency in a non-threatening situation and a tendency toward revenge in a threatening situation. The high self-image officer may just be a "tough cop." Future studies should provide measures to prevent possible confounding of "degree of physical threat" in a situation with the distinction between leniency and revenge.

E. Suggestions for Further Study

It is proposed that a second study be conducted, applying revised "philosophy" items and a more selective set of predictor variables.

The three existing philosophy paragraphs could be shown to sheriffs, and they would be asked to construct similar paragraphs dealing with behaviors which they consider pertinent to job effectiveness. These same sheriffs could cite officers exemplary of these desired behaviors and attitude sets, and these subjects could provide a check on the validity of the measure. A greater number of paragraphs would provide the greater latitude of potential job effectiveness measures.

In light of the data previously cited, some variables could be deleted. One measure of self-concept seems sufficient; the self-esteem scale (Robinson and Shaver, 1969: 100-101) seems the best choice in the light of its greater predictive value. An additional measure of anomie (Robinson and Shaver, 1969: 202) would prove useful.

The proposed instrument for the second study, to be conducted using as wide a range of sheriffs and deputies as possible, would utilize measures of the following: age, height, weight, pay, education, training, experience. In addition, the study will gather information concerning deputy prestige, intolerance to ambiguity, self-esteem, anomie; and as many philosophy oriented paragraphs as can be validated against existing exemplary responses to the ten variables will be factor analyzed and the factors used as predictors of response to the philosophy paragraphs.

Data from the second stage of this research are now being gathered. As yet the subject N is too small for meaningful regression analysis. The results of the final analysis, as well as copies of the second phase research instrument, will be available from the authors upon request.

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